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Out in the Cold?

U.S. Fears Counterspy Was Seized by Soviets; Agency Bungling Seen

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On the evening of Dec. 20, 1975, an American working undercover for the Federal Bureau of Investigation walked to the steps of the Votivkirche in Vienna for a prearranged meeting at the cathedral with Oleg Kozlov and Mikhail Kuryshev, two agents for the KGB, the Soviet secret police. It was his last stroll on free soil. He has never been seen since.

The disappearance of the American, Nicholas Shadrin, hasn't been publicized or even publicly acknowledged. The Russians won't concede that he was kidnapped—though the U.S. believes he was—especially not from the capital of a neutral nation. And U.S. officials aren't anxious to disclose the bureaucratic bungling that preceded his disappearance and the diplomatic blunders that may be keeping him in captivity.

But Mr. Shadrin's fate could become a prickly political issue soon. Whether for good reason or not, his many admirers in the U.S. intelligence community fear that he is being abandoned by the U.S. — even though the State Department insists it is doing its best to get Mr. Shadrin released, if he is still alive.

Now, some of Mr. Shadrin's friends are beginning to speak up about what they feel are the government's half-hearted efforts to retrieve him, and details are seeping out. They raise troublesome questions — especially for an administration espousing human rights for foreigners—about the government's obligation to Americans who risk their lives for the U.S.

Appeal by President Ford

President Ford did appeal for Mr. Shadrin's release in a private letter last December to Soviet party leader Leonid Brezhnev, and before leaving office Mr. Ford met with Mr. Shadrin's wife, Blanka, at the White House. But for reasons of global diplomacy, the Ford administration decided not to make a major push for Mr. Shadrin's return.

In January, outgoing Central Intelligence Agency Director George Bush briefed Jimmy Carter about the Shadrin case, and now National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is taking charge of it. He doesn't sound particularly hopeful. "I fully sympathize with your frustration and anxiety," Mr. Brzezinski told Mrs. Shadrin in a letter dated July 5. "I only wish I could strike a more positive note and offer you immediate reassurance."

As all this high-level attention attests, Nicholas Shadrin wasn't just an ordinary spy. He was a captain in the Soviet navy who fled to the U.S. in 1959. He brought along "a great amount of good, hard intelligence about Soviet military developments," says retired Navy Capt. Thomas L. Dwyer, who coordinated the mont[illegible] defection Shadrin

Adds William Howe, a civilian then working in the Office of Naval Intelligence: "His information was extremely valuable. Our government had no doubt" that Mr. Shadrin wasn't a Soviet agent.

Attention in Congress

At the CIA's request, Sen. James Eastland, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a conservative Mississippi Democrat, helped to get through Congress special legislation conferring U.S. citizenship on the one-time Communist Party member. In the House, the Committee on Un-American Activities eagerly put him on the witness stand to denounce Soviet expansionism abroad and repression at home; he testified under his given name, Nikolai Fedorovich Artamonov (he chose to use the name Shadrin after his defection).

In the early 1960s, Mr. Shadrin began working for the Defense Intelligence Agency as an analyst of Soviet naval literature ("he was an excellent man," a superior recalls), and he lectured once a year at the Naval War College. The Russians reacted furiously, trying and convicting him in absentia on charges of treason. His sentence was death.

Nevertheless, starting in 1966 or so, Mr. Shadrin heeded his adopted country's call to serve without pay as a counterintelligence agent acting under FBI direction. At substantial risk, he pretended that he desired to return to Russia, feigned cooperation with the KGB, and slipped to the Russians "military secrets" supplied by the CIA.

Some sideline work for the FBI took him on missions abroad, to Canada in 1971 and to Europe in 1972, for example. No slip-ups occurred. "I considered him to be absolutely reliable and completely on our side," says James Wooten, an FBI man who controlled Mr. Shadrin's counterspy activities for 10 years.

The Fateful Mission

Then came the fateful mission to Vienna in December 1975. Mr. Shadrin took his wife along (to go skiing, he told her). An initial meeting with the two KGB agents on the night of Dec. 18 went smoothly.

Mr. Shadrin became edgy, however, perhaps because the Russians said he soon would be promoted to colonel in the KGB and he knew the KGB commonly awards such promotions to marked men as a way of making them feel trusted. So after a CIA officer had debriefed him, next to a running shower in Suite 361 of the Bristol Hotel in Vienna, he told Mrs. Shadrin the names of agents Kozlov and Kuryshev and asked her to write them down. "Something apparently was said or inferred which made him concerned," she recalls.

The acting CIA station chief in Vienna had canceled all leaves and had planned to keep Mr. Shadrin under protective surveillance. "We could have put people on the street or in autos," he says. But the Russian-speaking CIA officer sent from Washington to supervise the mission says the planned surveillance was canceled at the FBI's request out of concern that, if spotted by the KGB, it might be a tip-off that Mr. Shadrin was a U.S. agent. And on the night of Dec. 20, the night Mr. Shadrin disappeared, the CIA official went to dinner at a friend's home in a Vienna suburb and didn't return to the city until after 1 a.m.

By then, Mrs. Shadrin was frantically phoning to report that her husband hadn't come back from his meeting with the KGB. She hasn't seen him since that night, and she blames a bureaucratic snafu by U.S. intelligence agencies for his disappearance.

Some intelligence experts agree. "I don't think they did right by Shadrin," says Lt. Gen. Daniel O. Graham, who retired last year as director of the Defense Department's Defense Intelligence Agency. "Quite obviously the U.S. people who were supposed to keep an eye out lost track of him. They didn't keep him under direct surveillance when they should have, or else I don't think this could have happened," Mr. Graham says.

When news of Mr. Shadrin's presumed kidnapping hit Washington, the bureaucracy scurried for cover. "There are too many agencies involved, and they're all running," William Hyland of the National Security Council told a visitor weeks afterward. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger broached the disappearance with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin; Mr. Dobrynin said his government didn't know anything about the case.

Dissatisfied, Mrs. Shadrin early last year hired Richard Copaken, a 36-year-old partner in the Washington law firm of Covington & Burling. Within a month, Mr. Copaken opened unofficial channels to Moscow through Wolfgang Vogel, an attorney in East Berlin who often acts as a secret conduit for exchanging spies or political prisoners between East and West; among other deals, he handled the celebrated exchange of Soviet spy Rudolf Abel for American U2 pilot Gary Francis Powers in the early 1960s.

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